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Sermon preached by the Rev. David James Burrell, D.D., LL.D., on Sunday, February 7th, 1909, in the Marble Collegiate Church, Fifth Avenue and Twenty-ninth Street, Manhattan.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF LINCOLN.

"He was preferred above the Presidents because an Excellent Spirit was in him."—Daniel 6, 3.

It is doubtful if there ever was a more important forensic duel than the series of joint debates in which Lincoln and Douglas urged their respective claims as candidates for the United States Senate in 1858.

At that time Freeport, where the most significant of these debates was held, was a frontier town of considerable importance; not merely as a supply station for pilgrims on their way to regions beyond, but because most of its people were of the best American type, stalwart, independent, enterprising men, who had gone West to grow up with the country, the stuff that good citizens are made of.

The Fremont campaign of '56 had been vigorously pushed along the Northern tier of counties in Illinois; and the newly organized party had made many converts. My father was one of these prisoners of hope. I well remember the interest he took in the rising fame of "the tall lawyer from Sangamon County."

The name of Douglas was already one to juggle with. He had crossed swords on the floor of the Capitol and elsewhere with Webster, Chase, Crittenden, Trumbull and other intellectual athletes, and had proven himself a foeman worthy of their steel.

Mr. Lincoln was a trained speaker, though his career had been less brilliant. At the bar and on the stump he had vindicated his power as a master of argument and ready wit. The people had come to believe in his sterling integrity and patriotism. They called him "Honest Abe"; and their verdict was, "You can trust him."

On the morning of the appointed day the people came thronging into Freeport from all the surrounding country. The friends of Mr. Douglas were sanguine as to the outcome, because their champion had won his laurels on many a well-fought field. The friends of Mr. Lincoln, also, were hopeful, but not without misgiving. All alike felt that great issues were at stake. It was a time of omens; the Civil War was drawing on apace; there was a smell of sulphur in the air.

The sound of fife and drum at length announced the fact that one of the processions was leaving the Pecatonica bridge and marching up the Main Street. In front came a charcoal wagon with high flaring sides, drawn by six horses. Up aloft sat "Wilse" Shaffer, afterward chief of General Butler's staff, a merchant of the town and an accomplished whip. Beside him sat Mr. Lincoln, tall and thin almost to emaciation; his six-feet-four inches emphasized by a very literal "stove pipe" hat. The rear seats of the wagon were occupied by Mr. Lincoln's advisory committee and other distinguished citizens. Then came a cavalcade of young women, dressed to represent the various States of the Union. This was followed by a line of "prairie schooners," that is, farm wagons with canvas tops, but the canvas had been removed for this occasion and the frames trimmed with leafy boughs; for this was distinctly an affair of the people. It was a muster of the Third Estate.

The other procession, which followed presently, was of a different character. It was an array of carriages, chariots of the mighty, though somewhat motley, in the necessity of the case. In the van came

a brass band, playing, "Lo, the Conquering Hero Comes"; then an open barouche in which sat Mr. Douglas, a trifle over five feet tall, and beside him Colonel James Mitchell, a gentleman of the old school, well known throughout the West as a stalwart adherent of the Bourbon faith. The lesser lights followed in more modest equipages, and the rank and file of partisans came trooping in their wake.

The meeting was in an open field in the outskirts of the town. I remember, as if it were but yesterday, the excitement pent up in my young bosom as I stood beside my father in the jostling crowd, waiting for the opening of the debate. The two gladiators sat on opposite sides of the platform, surrounded by their henchmen. The contrast was so striking and so greatly to the disadvantage of Mr. Lincoln that my young heart sank within me.

The debate was opened by Mr. Lincoln who, as everybody knows, was a lank, cadaverous, homely man; but his face bespoke the gift of honest common sense, and there was a most captivating twinkle in his eyes. He began in a low voice with his hands behind him. His gestures were few, though now and then his long index finger did valiant service. There was little or no ranting or sawing of the air. As he proceeded his thin voice rose to a higher pitch. He won and held the attention of his hearers. He reasoned with them in plain Anglo-Saxon. He laid hold of current problems with a bony grip of irresistible logic, now and then relieving the tension with a parenthetical but always relevant "That reminds me." And occasionally he pointed a thin finger at his opponent, which seemed to worry him. As the speech went on the fears of the boy of thirteen vanished and hope mounted on exultant wings. His man was better than he looked! And he was making his point; which was the main matter after all. The merits of the argument—on which future issues, lurid with the flames of battle, were depending—did not gravely impress this youthful hearer; it was sufficient for him

that his tall champion was coming off with flying colors.

His opponent rose to reply. Judge Douglas was, despite his inferior stature, one of the most imposing figures I have ever seen. His massive head with its leonine locks, his strong, square features and eager eyes flashing from beneath a broad, high forehead, proclaimed him a born orator. He was rightly called "the Little Giant." His voice, a deep, resonant basso, could be heard distinctly by every one in the vast assembly. Not a word was lost. He was one of the last of the old Websterian school of orators, dignified, studiously rhetorical, smooth and orotund, at times flamboyant, but always impressive and commanding. I recall little or nothing of his discourse in particular, but his native eloquence thrilled every fiber of me.

Two years after that debate we watched the bulletin boards in our frontier town for reports of the Republican convention in session in "The Wigwam" at Chicago. Foremost among the candidates for the Presidential nomination was William H. Seward. I recall vividly the disappointment of many, my father among them, when the news came that Lincoln, a mere country lawyer, had been preferred to a Statesman so tried, trusty and illustrious. But the outcome proved the wisdom of that choice. Never in the history of our country has there been a more manifest interposition of divine Providence than in the selection of Lincoln to hold the helm of government during the boisterous years of our Civil War.

On the night of election day in 1860, the people of Freeport turned out again, en masse, to hear Mr. Douglas for the last time. He had been canvassing the country in his own behalf as a candidate for the Presidency. His voice was worn to tatters and he bore the haggard look of a defeated man. The candle had burned to its socket. He died in the following June, but not until he had given President Lincoln repeated assurance of his support in whatever constitutional efforts he might make to maintain the

Union. He stood beside the President-elect at his inauguration and held his hat while the oath of office was administered to him. And Douglas made one great speech which helped mightily to keep Southern Illinois loyal to the Union.

The fame of Lincoln grows brighter with the passing years. The keynote of his character is in one of his own terse sentences, "Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

I. Mr. Lincoln was True to Himself.

In his private life, it is universally conceded, he was an upright man. He told the truth, paid his honest debts, wronged none of his fellows and was not addicted to any of the vulgar vices. In a time when intemperance was common, he was openly and avowedly a teetotaler. To the Committee that waited upon him to inform him of his nomination, he said, "Gentlemen, let us pledge our mutual healths in the healthiest beverage which God has ever given to man. It is the only beverage I have ever used and I cannot conscientiously depart from it on this occasion. It is pure Adam's ale."

In his political life he was equally above reproach. I am not among those who regard politics as a bad business or politicians as sinners above all the Galileans. But there is this to be said: the great temptation in our political life is to emphasize party as against principle and to give way to considerations of expediency when they conflict with the clear demands of duty.

But the thought of rightness was supreme in the mind of this man. He was fond of the phrase, "the right as God gives us to see the right." On one occasion a clergyman said, "I hope the Lord is on our side in this war"; to which he replied, "I am not much concerned about that; for the Lord is always on the side of the right; but it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

II. He was True to his Country.

It is to be feared that in our commendable eagerness to emphasize the importance of international peace and comity we are losing in some measure the old-fashioned virtue of patriotism. But God forbid that we should ever, even in our devotion to the brotherhood of man, lose aught of our love of Country, or grow so magnanimously catholic that we cannot say,

My native country thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I sing!

The soul of Mr. Lincoln was harrowed by the thought that the Union might be rent asunder by the slavery question. The text of his addresses in the famous series of debates was, "*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*" On that proposition he planted himself and, despite the remonstrance of friends and the denunciation of foes, declined to yield an inch. His law-partner Herndon called this "impolitic"; to which he replied, "That makes no difference; it is true. And I will say it! I would rather be defeated on that fact, than be victorious without it." When his advisory committee begged him to refrain from saying it, his answer was, "I have thought about this matter a good deal, gentlemen. I have weighed it every way; and I am convinced that the truth should be spoken. If I go down because of it, let me go down linked to truth and die in advocacy of right. This nation cannot live in injustice. A house divided against itself cannot stand. I say it again and again!"

In the course of Mr. Lincoln's address at Freeport he propounded to his opponent this question: "*Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen, exclude slavery from its limits?*" The question was asked against the united protest of his advisory committee, who affirmed that it would force Judge Douglas from his equivocal stand on the slavery question and defeat the

hopes of Mr. Lincoln for the Senatorship. It was destined, indeed, to do that very thing, but in doing so to make the cause of freedom stronger and wield a favorable influence on the conduct and outcome of the approaching Civil War.

The answer made by Judge Douglas removed him from "the middle of the road." He said, "*It matters not which way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a Territory under the Constitution, the people may lawfully introduce or exclude it as they please, since slavery cannot exist a day nor an hour, anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulation.*" In those words the speaker at once cleared his way to the Senate, and, by widening the schism in his party on the slavery question, rang the death-knell of his own long-cherished hopes for the Presidency. As one of his biographers has said, "Of that answer Douglas instantly died. The red gleaming, Southern tomahawk flashed high and clean; and he was removed out of Lincoln's way." But Mr. Lincoln himself was actuated by no thought of personal advancement. He had marked out his patriotic course—the course that was right "as God gave him to see the right"; and he would not swerve from it.

III. He was True to his Fellow men.

He was distinctly a man of the people and was proud of it. His devotion to the people was shown in his frequent use of such phrases as these: "You can trust the people," "You can fool some of the people some of the time, and all of the people some of the time; but you cannot fool all the people all the time." The closing words of his Gettysburg speech are among the classics of our Country; "Let us here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth!"

The love of humanity was highly developed in him.

It is a significant fact that the man providentially chosen as Commander-in-chief of the Armies of the Civil War was one whose whole being was in a constant state of protest against the horrors of war. He stood on the battlefield, after Gettysburg, saying over and over, "O, this is awful! awful!" His heart was so tender that the Secretary of War was obliged, once and again, to protest against his pardons and reprieves. A woman who came to intercede for the pardon of her son, who had been sentenced to death for desertion, left the presence of Mr. Lincoln saying, "I have always been told that he was a homely man, but O, he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

The happiest day in Lincoln's life was when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation and broke the fetters of four million slaves! No wonder that, on a visit to Richmond, at the close of the War, the horses were removed from his carriage and black hands drew him through the streets amid shouts of "God bless Massa Lincoln!"

His was a great, kindly heart. What other of the world's Mighties in war or statesmanship has ever sealed a victory with such words as these: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace"?

IV. And, best of all, this man was True to God.

It has been affirmed—chiefly on the authority of Mr. Herndon, his early associate in the practice of law—that Mr. Lincoln "had no faith," and that he "boldly avowed himself an infidel."

This is conceded to be true of his earlier life; but with respect to his later years it is as far as possible from the truth. He never united with any church, for reasons which seemed to him good and sufficient; though had his life been spared he would have done

so. To his pastor, Dr. Gurley, of Washington, he said, "I have made up my mind; at your next Communion I shall apply for admission to your Church." He did not live to carry out that purpose. But there is no lack of evidence to show—and this is the matter of chief importance—that he believed in every one of the fundamental doctrines of the religion of Christ.

He believed in God. He affirmed, not once but again and again, in the discharge of his high office, in the conduct of the war and in the liberation of the slaves, that he regarded himself as "an instrument used of God."

He believed in Prayer, and was himself a praying man. Witness his farewell address to his old friends and neighbors at Springfield when he was setting out for Washington; "My friends, no one not in my situation can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place and the kindness of these people I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born and here one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was on the President's mind long before he did it. He was praying and waiting on God. On being urged by an impatient friend to act without further delay, he said, "I hope it will not be irreverent to say that, if it is probable that God would reveal his will to others on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed that He would reveal it directly to me. For unless I am more deceived in myself than I often am,

it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter; and if I can learn what it is, I will do it."

In a conversation with General Sickles, with reference to the battle of Gettysburg, he spoke thus without reserve of his communion with God: "In the pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic stricken, I was oppressed by the gravity of affairs and went into my room and locked the door and got down on my knees, and prayed to God mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told him that this was His war, and our cause was His cause. And I, then and there, made a solemn vow to Almighty God that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him. And He did, and I will! And after that—I can't explain it—a sweet comfort crept into my soul that things would go all right; and I had no fears about you." And, on another occasion, in speaking of the siege of Vicksburg, he said, "I have been praying over Vicksburg; and I believe our Heavenly Father is going to give us a victory there, too."

On the receipt of the news of the capitulation of Lee, the President, when he met his Cabinet, was for a time unable to give utterance to his feelings; then, at his request, "they all dropped on their knees and offered in tears and silence their humble and hearty thanks to God."

And, further, Mr. Lincoln was a believer in the Bible. The views of his earlier life were wholly reversed at the time when the solemn duties and obligations of his high office devolved upon him. The Rev. James Smith of Springfield, Ill., says that about that time he presented before Mr. Lincoln, at his request, the arguments in favor of the inspiration of the Book; whereupon, after a long and careful review of the question, *pro* and *contra*, Mr. Lincoln declared to him that the arguments in favor of the divine authority and inspiration of the Bible were unanswerable. So deep was his conviction upon this point that, on being invited subsequently to deliver the address at the anni-

versary of the Bible Society he consented and did so. He was, ever after, an earnest and habitual reader and student of the Word of God. His chief aid was Cruden's Concordance; and his copy was a well-thumbed book. A year before his assassination he said in a letter to the Hon. Joshua Speed, "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this Book on reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man."

Nor is this all. He was a devout believer in Christ. It has been said that he was in sympathy with the Unitarians in their denial of the Divinity of Christ. Let us see. He frequently referred to Christ as "the Saviour." In the darkest days of the war he wrote to a friend, "I have been reading, on my knees, the story of Gethsemane; where the Son of God prayed in vain that the cup of bitterness might pass from him. But," they say, "Unitarians also speak of Jesus as 'the Saviour' and 'the Son of God.'" It was not Mr. Lincoln's habit, however, to juggle with language in that way. Read these words of his in a letter to the Hon. Newton Bateman, written in the campaign of 1860, "I know there is a God; and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming and I know His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me—and I think He has—I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right; for Christ teaches it; and Christ is God. I have told them that a house divided against itself cannot stand. And Christ and reason say the same thing; and they will find it so. My opponent doesn't care whether slavery is voted up or voted down; but God cares, and I care. And with God's help I shall not fail! I may not see the end; but it will come, and I shall be vindicated. And these men will find that they have not read their Bibles aright."

The man who was familiarly known as "Honest Abe" was surely too honest to utter language as one utters false coin. When he spoke of Christ as "the

Saviour" and as "the Son of God" he meant it. And how could a denier of the Deity of Jesus make this statement, "I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it; and *Christ is God*"?

No man is perfect. President Lincoln was a man subject to like passions as other men. But taking his words at their face value, as the words of an honest man, there can remain no shadow of doubt as to his belief in all the cardinal truths of Christianity and as to the fact that he considered himself a Christian man.

The two great figures in our American history are Washington and Lincoln; and each of these paid eloquent tribute, in faith and practice, to the Bible and the Son of God. One of these lingers in our memory as he knelt at Valley Forge, in the very midnight of the Revolution, pleading for the triumph of our cause; and the other as he knelt with his Cabinet, at the triumphant close of our Civil War, humbly, silently thanking God.

Ours is a Christian country. Let us praise God for the two Mighties who have done so much to make and keep it so.

Our Father's God, to thee,
Author of liberty,

To Thee we sing;
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King!

A sermon of Dr. Burrell's is gratuitously distributed every Sunday evening from October to June inclusive. For the convenience of persons wishing to receive them regularly, a mailing list has been established, to which any name may be added at any time upon payment of one dollar to cover postage, etc, for one year. On this list are the names of many persons near and far who by reason of age or infirmities are unable to attend Church.

Addresses and subscriptions should be sent to H. P. Wareheim, 1 West 29th Street, New York City.